

Fulbright to Use 'Papers' In U.S. Policy Hearings

Associated Press

Chairman I. W. Fulbright (D-Ark.) said yesterday that his Senate Foreign Relations Committee will use the Pentagon Papers as the basis for hearings on foreign-policy decisions leading to U.S. involvement in the Vietnam war.

Starting possibly in early May, the hearings will cover the critical early period of the Cold War "around the end of World War II and the years immediately following," Fulbright said.

The announcement coincided with release of the second committee staff study of the Defense Department history of "U.S. Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967." The history, known as the "Pentagon Papers," became known through leaks to newspapers last June.

Fulbright said the study by researcher Robert M. Blum appears to confirm his belief that "the present conflict in Southeast Asia might have been avoided had the United States not disregarded Ho Chi Minh's friendly overtures to the United States during and immediately after World War II."

The study quotes from diplomatic correspondence and letters from Ho Chi Minh to

President Harry S. Truman and Secretary of State James F. Byrnes in 1945 and 1946 reflecting desire for friendly relations, student exchanges and American assistance for Vietnamese independence.

The staff report says, "As far as can be determined from available records, Ho Chi Minh's letters and telegrams to the President and the Secretary of State never received a reply... To have recognized Ho and his government... would have been, it was felt, a major irritant in Franco-American relations."

In early 1947, the report says, "another assumption began to govern American policy in Indochina: Ho Chi Minh was an agent of Russia, an extension of Soviet foreign policy in Southeast Asia."

"But it was an assumption that lacked conclusive evidence," the report said.

Fulbright commented: "We thus fashioned a foreign policy in Southeast Asia based on an assumption never proven, an assumption that has had a great deal to do with leading this country into a disaster in Vietnam that will continue to plague us for many years to come."